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NEGRO FOLK-LORE IN SOUTH CAROLINA.

BY HENRY C. DAVIS.

To separate the lore of the negro from that of the white demands a searching-out of origins to determine what, amid his borrowings from the whites, is his peculiar inheritance, and what, in his present environment, he is creating as representative of his life. The one effort relates to his early history; the other, to his sociological condition. For both, material is lacking. Neither of these aims, however attractive and interesting, falls within the purpose of this paper, which, after all, is to record some negro-lore as gathered from negroes, without implying its separation necessarily from material that is white-lore.

It seems, in fact, an error to suppose the lore of the races to be entirely distinct. Rather, it coincides along many lines, and separates where the cultures of the races bear apart. Though the negro's color clearly marks him off from the white man, and his life is different, there is no sharp dividing-line between his lore and that of the whites. Even before this fact becomes evident as one meets difficulties in making a separate classification, its truth seems inferrible, at least, from facts in the life of the races. Except on the great plantations, the races have been in intimate sociological contact. Extreme massing of negroes in quarters made the negro depend on his kind, and here it is that "gullah" predominates. Roughly, the greater the departure from the standard in dialect, the less is the lore of the negro like that of the white. Elsewhere, however, the close relationships of life brought the cultures nearer in lore. Many contacts are found in the relation of master and servant, mistress and maid, child and playmate or nurse; and, later, of employer and employee, seller and buyer, farmer and hired hand. Thus, a tale, a moon sign for planting, a ring-game, or a song, may appear in one place as negro-lore and in another as white-lore. "Go-in-and-out-the-window," for example, I have seen in Columbia, S.C., as a negro game, a chance happening; for the whites have played it, and apparently the negroes got it from the whites.

Superficially in the lore of the State there is great similarity; but its diversity points to group division somewhat along natural divisions. This fact of difference does not in itself separate negro-lore from white-lore; since it is unlikely, that, in the limited sphere of negro life, the negro would have retained all the lore that he has heard individually as the last link in an alien chain stretching back to Africa. And, while one cannot suppose a tendency toward selecting and retaining particular superstitions as his own, it seems true that he has chosen or forgotten unevenly, or has recalled incorrectly, or has re-created imaginatively; so that, as a result, we are confronted with this diversity. With him, an unballasted past is swamped in a present-day community life, unstable itself but an entity, pools after a rain. Hence the need of localizing the lore of the negro.

Along with this, there should be a study of his history and environment. When these have not been made out satisfactorily for the whites, it is not strange that as to the negroes the matter is in the dark. The negro has perhaps preserved an earlier stage of tradition, which has vanished among the whites; certainly his lore is less interfered with by literature and learning. If local history and genealogy illuminate the culture of larger units in other fields, why not that of folk-lore?

In spite of an apparent homogeneity of peoples in South Carolina, there are in fact marked groupings which affect not only folk-lore, but all culture. Partly they are natural, partly due to fixity of abode, and aversion to change. The divisions are: 1. The up-country or Piedmont region, and the low-country or the coastal plain; 2. The negro and the white, a cross-division athwart the others; 3. The rich and the poor; 4. The industrial or milling class and the agricultural; 5. National or folk, according to place of settlement within the borders of the State.

While similar divisions exist elsewhere, these are real, not mechanical divisions: they are at once to be recognized. The increasing wealth and the diffusion of education in the schools, along with greater means for travel and narrower specialization, calling for a swarming-out of the old hives, will make away entirely with local characteristics. Before this blending of regions of folk-lore by the stirring-about of peoples can happen, it is well to record songs and sayings as of negro or of white, by county, and according to social or economic condition. Coast, "gullah," German, Scotch-Irish, negro, town, mill district, farm, mountaineer,—these are terms worth while in noting South Carolina lore and in assigning it to particular counties. As the field for gathering material widens, or, rather, deepens, the greater the necessity of recording, where possible, all facts as to the source of the information.

TALES AND SAYINGS.

Two tales from the negroes of the low-country are given below. The first suggests Æsop's tale of "The Cock and the Fox," in which the latter craftily seeks to beguile his intended prey with news of a truce of the animals. It was told by an old negro to a gentleman who had gone hunting. The question had arisen, whether the proposed hunt would not be out of season. A constable was present, and mainly on the assertion of the gentleman, in the absence of means of finding out the law, it was decided that the hunting was in season.

That night the negro said to him, "Marse —, you remind me of 'The Fox and the Goose;' " and he told the story.

THE FOX AND THE GOOSE.¹

One day a Fox was going down the road and saw a Goose. "Good-morning, Goose," he said; and the Goose flew up on a limb and said, "Good-morning, Fox."

Then the Fox said, "You ain't afraid of me, is you? Haven't you heard of the meeting up at the hall the other night?"

"No, Fox. What was that?"

"You haven't heard about all the animals meeting up at the hall! Why, they passed a law that no animal must hurt any other animal. Come down and let me tell you about it. The hawk mustn't catch the chicken, and the dog mustn't chase the rabbit, and the lion mustn't hurt the lamb. No animal must hurt any other animal."

"Is that so!"

"Yes, all live friendly together. Come down, and don't be afraid."

As the Goose was about to fly down, way off in the woods they heard a "Woo-wooh! woo-wooh!" and the Fox looked around.

"Come down, Goose," he said.

And the Dog got closer. "Woo-wooh!"

Then the Fox started to sneak off; and the Goose said, "Fox, you ain't scared of the Dog, is you? Didn't all the animals pass a law at the meeting not to bother each other any more?"

"Yes," replied the Fox as he trotted away quickly, "the animals passed the law; but some of the animals round here ain't got much respect for the law."

However remote the source of this story, the negro knew it only as folk-lore. The same aptness, and love of illustration drawn from animal life, are seen in the following account.

A gentleman said to his employee, a negro, "Jim, go down to the 'washer' (at the phosphate-works) and get the mule, and go to Pinckney's and get the mule, and drive down to the store and get the groceries."

¹ Compare *The State* (Columbia, S.C.), Dec. 7, 1913.

"Mr. Taylor," replied the negro, in great doubt, "you tell me to go three places at the same time. Dog got four legs, but he can't run in but one path."

A fable of creation recalls the classical story of the division of parts of the sacrificial ox between god and man, and, more nearly, Irving's story of the division of occupations among Indian, negro, and white.¹ The version in "gullah" follows.

WHY THE NEGRO WORKS.²

In de beginnin', God he tuk two bundle, an' he place 'em before a nigger an' a white man. An' one bundle he mek berry big, an' one bundle bin berry little. De nigger he bin hab fust choice, an' you know a nigger wid he greedy big eye: he tink de big bundle de best, so he tek dat. Den de white man he tek what was left, — de leetle bundle.

Now, when dey unwrop deys bundle, de white man he fine in e leetle bundle a pen an' a bottle of ink; an' dat's how come he do de writin' ob de worl'. An' de nigger he fin' de hoe an' de plough an' de axe in e bundle; an' dat's how come he hafter do de wuk in de worl'."

Among the Rabbit stories there are two which were told in Columbia by Joseph LeConte before the days of Uncle Remus. In one, B'rer Rabbit has a feast, and while grace is being said he ducks the buzzard's head into the hot hominy: that is why the buzzards are bald.³ The other told of Sambo's exploit of riding the alligator; he "job 'im in the right eye" with his thumb to make him go to the left, and in the left eye to go to the right; but, when asked what he did when the alligator swam downward, he replied, "Ah, Massa, dat berry hard!" But these and other stories — of "Why the Bear has no Tail" and of "The Tar-Baby" — belong here, in this instance, only by inference, to South Carolina.

A negro story explains why the cat eats first, and washes her face and hands afterwards.

WHY THE CAT EATS FIRST.

One day a Cat caught a Mouse and was about to eat it. The Mouse said, "You have no manners: you should wash your face and hands before you eat." Thereupon the Cat began to lick her paws and rub them on her face. The Mouse thus took advantage of its opportunity

¹ Crayon Papers (The Seminoles. Origin of the White, the Red, and the Black Men: a Seminole Tradition).

² By Mrs. Harriette Kershaw Leiding of Charleston, S.C. Compare *The State* (Columbia, S.C.), Dec. 7, 1913.

³ Differs from account in "Animal Tales from North Carolina" (this *Journal*, vol. xi, p. 284).

to run away. Ever since that time, the cat eats first and washes afterwards.

From the same source as the above comes the information that in 1861 a tar-baby was painted above the door of a blacksmith shop on the McDowell plantation near Sumter, S.C. It was for good luck, or to guard the shop against ill luck. Thus the tar-baby has other uses than to catch B'rer Rabbit.

Of the following incomplete list of negro superstitions the greater number are from central South Carolina. Nearly all I have heard from negroes, and in many of them I have firmly believed.

SUPERSTITIONS AMONG THE NEGROES.

1. The number of stars within a lunar halo indicates the number of days before clear weather.
2. Potatoes and root-crops should be planted in "the dark of the moon;" corn, peas, and beans, in "the light of the moon."¹ Shingles laid on during the increase of the moon will swell up or curl up. Plant watermelons May 1, before day, by poking the seed in with your finger.
3. A crawfish or "cooter" (terrapin) will hold on until it hears thunder.
4. A wasp, hornet, or snake will not entirely die before the sun goes down. This is true even if you burn up the body and stir the ashes together.
5. A frizzly chicken comes out of the egg backwards; it is the devil's own: and some negroes will refuse to kill a frizzly chicken.
6. An eel is the male catfish.
7. The blue insect that looks like the dragon-fly which flits over streams, is a "snake-doctor." It is bad luck to kill a "snake-doctor."
8. If you kill a "pilot-snake," look out for the rattler, which will follow soon.
9. The coach-whip snake can roll up like a "hoop" snake, and overtake a swift runner. His tail is plaited² in four plaits. With it he whips his victim to death. It is useless to feign death in the hope that he will be deceived. He thrusts the pointed end of his tail into the unfortunate man's ear, and punctures the eardrum, so that he must cry out and be killed.
10. A lizard sheds its tail to escape from your hand. He comes back and gets his tail, or runs off with it in his mouth, puts it back on, and it grows.
11. Similarly, the garter-snake when broken apart can quickly re-assemble the pieces.

¹ Compare this Journal, vol. vi, p. 299 (Tennessee); vol. xii, p. 265 (Georgia).

² Pronounced "platted." Compare "plat-eye," p. 248, No. 54.

12. The bark of the spring lizard or of the coral-colored lizard is sure death.¹ These animals are called "puppy-dogs."
13. The sting of the big "cow-ant"² is deadly poison.
14. Plant-lice come from the dew on cotton.
15. Hair-worms in pools develop from horse-hairs.
16. Hang a dead snake on a bush or fence to bring rain.
17. Scratch the boat's mast, and whistle for wind.
18. Stir cake-dough always "the same way," usually clockwise, or the cake will fall.
19. Salve for ear-ache may be made by stewing earth-worms. Use the fat.
20. Elderberry-flowers stewed in lard make a good ointment for red-bug-bites.
21. An eel-skin is good to rub with for rheumatism.
22. Red flannel cures rheumatism.
23. A necklace of lengths of "tread-saft"³ roots strung on a thread makes teething easy. Do not remove it, but let it wear out.
24. A camphor⁴ or assafoetida bag under the neck prevents contagious diseases.
25. A necklace of small onions (mashed) will cure a serious case of diphtheria.
26. A Jamestown-weed poultice cures headache or rheumatism.
27. Medicinal teas are made from cherry-bark, pokeweed, redoak-bark, hoarhound, sage, red sassafras, and other "yarbs." White-sassafras tea will cause blindness.
28. To cure "fallen palate," twist two locks of hair tightly together on the top of the head, and wrap them with a string.
29. Bad luck it is to begin work on Friday. Accidents are the direct consequence of wilfulness in this respect.
30. A child stepped over won't grow; or a man, thrive. Step back quickly, or there will be trouble. To step over a fishing-pole destroys luck, but stepping back restores it. At certain times a woman should not step over melon-vines: should she do so, they will bear no fruit.
31. Turn a chair around on one leg in the house, and somebody will die. To open an umbrella indoors is bad luck.
32. The howling of a dog, the screeching of an owl, the wailing of the whippoorwill, and the ticking of the "death-watch" in the wall or bedpost, are ill omens, signifying death.

¹ This suggests the mandrake story.

² *Sphærophthalma occidentalis* (female), or velvet-ant. "In Texas it is known as the 'cow-killer ant,' because of a popular superstition that its sting is very dangerous to live-stock." — COMSTOCK, *A Manual for the Study of Insects* (1899), p. 648.

³ *Solanum Carolinense* (horse-nettle).

⁴ So in Boston.

33. The sight of a ghost, oftentimes "a little low (short) woman," presages death.¹
34. It is evil to kill a dove.
35. A "hag" may be caught in a bottle properly conjured. If it is hidden in ashes under the fire, she will die in agony.²
36. Rub pepper and salt into the skin left behind by a "hag," so that when she returns from her mischief and resumes her skin, as she must before daybreak, the burning pain will drive her out again to her death.
37. The tangles in hair are witches' stirrups which have been used in nightly riding.
38. To recover lost articles, spit in the palm of the hand and strike with thumb or forefinger. This will show you the direction in which to search. If you fail at first, try again, and you will find what you are looking for.
39. A rabbit-foot in your pocket gives good luck. The left hind-foot of a graveyard rabbit killed in the dark of the moon serves best. With the rabbit-foot, the owner may "put Gooffer" on what he wants to be successful, as in a game of marbles.
40. "Gooffer" may be invoked against an opponent simply by pronouncing the word, or by adding a mark or cross-mark on the ground and spitting in or near it.
41. The "cunger-bag" may contain many articles, but additional value is given if it contains camel's hair procured from the camel by the possessor of the bag.
42. The sensitive-plant is the "be-shame'-bush." Chew the root, spit on the hand, and shake hands with any one whose affection you crave, and you will win his affections.³
43. For luck, put a black cat in the oven and cook her till she burns up. The only bone left will be jumping about in the spider. This bone will ward off evil.
44. A smooth black pebble may be a "luck-rock."
45. To make a dog stay, take hair from his tail, place it between two sticks, and bury it under the doorstep.⁴
46. To make a cat consent to remain in a new habitation, cut off the last joint of her tail, and she will stay.⁵

¹ Stories of the little low woman are common among whites and negroes in Beaufort and Richland Counties, South Carolina, and in Chatham County, Georgia.

² Compare this Journal, vol. vii, pp. 66-67, quoting the Southern Workman, March, 1894; compare also Southern Literary Journal, vol. iv, pp. 258-262 (1837), ascribed to Professor H. J. Nott.

³ From a negro, who learned it from an Indian woman.

⁴ Williamsburg County. For burying under the doorstep, see this Journal, vol. ix, p. 225; and vol. iii, p. 286.

⁵ From Sumter County comes the information that the same result may be accomplished by buttering her paws, as she will remain to lick the butter off. Mr. Phillips Barry mentions that this custom is found in New Hampshire.

47. It is a sin to use new lumber on an old house; for example, to add a new piazza. It is a sin to throw bread or any food into the fire.
48. If the ear burns, some one is talking about you.
49. Sneezing has the usual signs.¹
50. A hairy breast means riches; an itching palm means that money will come there.
51. Negro graves are covered with bits of broken crockery, lamps or toys.²
52. The bite of a blue-gummed negro is absolutely fatal.³
53. A new knife that has never cut wood is effective against the evils of the jack-o-lantern. (Georgetown.)
54. *Plat-eye*. — "Plat-eye" is an antebellum ha'nt still remembered and feared in Georgetown and Williamsburg Counties, probably in others. It is associated with the new moon and the form of an animal, usually a dog. One negro saw a form appear in the uncertain light, and grow larger, and then the fiery "plat-eye(s)" shone and disappeared. Another was driving down the road as the new moon was setting. A dog came trotting toward him, getting bigger each instant. When right at him, the animal's eyes "commence a-jumpin'," like fingers moving in the negro's face, and vanished. Another heard hoof-beats, and in terror saw a great horse appear. When this apparition passed away, only a little dog was to be seen. In Williamsburg County it is said that the "plat-eye" could be seen if any one would put into his eye "matter" taken from a dog's eye. It is to be hoped that no negroes care to see "plat-eye."

NEGRO SONGS.

I. SPIRITUAL, GENERAL, WORK, WAR-TIME.

In negro songs, South Carolina is rich. Twoscore are represented in whole or in part, and further search will bring to light a great many more. Omitting the usual hymns, which, however, are often characteristically modified in tune and in words, we have the following by no means complete list of negro songs of the spirit.

¹ As recorded for New York (this *Journal*, vol. v, p. 336), with this amendment, however:

"Sneeze on Sunday,
Safety seek,
Or the devil will get you all the week."

Compare also this *Journal*, vol. xii, p. 98.

² In Columbia and Ridgeway, S.C., perhaps elsewhere. Compare also this *Journal*, vol. iv, p. 214.

³ Compare this *Journal*, vol. xii, p. 267 (Georgia).

1. I don' wan' be buried in de Storm.
2. Joy, Joy in my Soul.
3. Baptizing Song: Sheep and Goat.
4. Oh, yes, Lord!
5. She's the Holy City.
6. The Old Ship of Zion.
7. Who built de Ark, Brudder No-rah, No-rah.
8. Co-lock she rock (Old Ark she rock).
9. I have some Friends in Glory.
10. Rest for the Weary.
11. Room enough in Paradise.
12. Pluck upon yo' Harp: Little David.
13. You shall be free when the Good Lord set you free.
14. Pharaoh's Army got drowned: Sister Mary, don't you weep.
15. Jerusalem Mornin'.
16. Sister Mary, where you kim frim (come from).
17. I'm on my Way.
18. Lock de Lion's Jaw.

Among songs of a general nature occur enough to suggest the incompleteness of the list. A mere scratching of the surface yields fifteen showing great variety. More will undoubtedly appear later.

1. You can't break this Sad Heart of mine.
2. Lulu, my Darling.
3. Bird in a Cage.
4. It's Nobody's Business.
5. Coonshine: I got a House in Baltimore.
6. Ain't it hard to be a Nigger!
7. What you going to do when your Meat give out?
8. Gim' crack Corn, I don' care.
9. Rounzip Corn.
10. Jesse James.
11. A Little mo' Cider, Cider.
12. Git along Home, Sally Gal.
13. I had a Sheep, Baa.
14. I'm looking for that Bully of the Town.
15. De Bell done ring, de Drum done beat (Antebellum).

The following seem more particularly adapted to be sung at work:
1. "That's the Hammer killed John Henry;" 2. "On the Mountain;"
3. "The Yaller Gal." However, any good song would seem to serve for this purpose.

Among war-time songs of the negroes I hesitate to include "Say, Darkies, did you see Old Maussa?" and the rollicking "Down in Alabama'." A tantalizing bit of negro song of the early eighties, embodying a myth, is reported from Columbia, S.C. Hampton, it seems, hangs out a flag and loses a finger as Sherman rides by. The fragment runs thus:—

Hampton had a Confederate flag,
 He hung it in de winder;
 By and by old Sherman come
 And shot off Hampton's finger.¹

The hanging-out of the flag in defiance to the invader is the familiar "Barbara Frietchie" motive; but the consequences are different, since the woman is spared at the commander's order; and Hampton the soldier, enemy of the composer of the stanza presumably, suffers a wound for his temerity.²

2. SONGS WITH DANCES OR GAMES.

In ring-games, the races hold common stock, greatly impaired, however, by competition with a flood of imported new material in the schools. The negroes used to play and sing the following, many years ago.

1. Cold Frosty Morning.
2. Go in-dang-out (in and out) de Window.
3. Do, Mr. Watchman, don't catch me: in de Ladies' Garden.
4. Here we go round the Mulberry-Bush.
5. Boil dat Cabbage down.
6. Jump Jim Crow.³
7. Rang-Tang Bustle up.

Except for the last two, these games are well known to the whites. To extend the list of negro games would be useless. A reference to a study made by Zach McGhee⁴ will show scores of games, some of them with songs, which one could infer are to be found among the negroes. His list will include nearly all, if not all, of the games of negro children.

3. SHIFTING OF STANZAS.

Stanzas of one song may serve in another with only the tune and the chorus to bind them together. These ballad fragments oftentimes make a highly interesting whole. As the negro must depend upon memory, and as, in the singing, oftentimes first one and then another will break out as leader with his favorite stanza, the exact wording is rarely fixed. The song is in a state of flux. The more widespread of these songs are taken up by the whites, and given wider currency through the medium of wags with good voices wherever there is a

¹ Compare *The State*, Dec. 7, 1913.

² Or is the account colorless?

³ Compare "Dorsetshire Children's Games" (*Folk-Lore Journal*, vol. vii, p. 251). Negro minstrels perhaps carried this song to England.

⁴ Compare "A Study in the Play-Life of Some South Carolina Children" (*Pedagogical Seminary* [1900], vol. vii, pp. 459, 478).

picnic journey or college informal gathering. Thus it is that to the tune of "Good-by, my Lover, Good-by," or other songs, any suitable stanzas may be sung; or these, in turn, may be shifted to the choral melody of some other song.

The whites have thus treated the songs of "Little David," "Pharaoh's Army," "You shall be Free." The same stanzas may serve in any of them. The negroes, it is true, keep these songs relatively fixed; but the whites—in Columbia, S.C., for example—may combine such a medley of stanzas as the following to a chorus; and perhaps the same tendency toward change would be more striking with the negro, were it not for the fact that the negro is singing, not a sober, but a fervent, religious hymn.

Upon de mountain I'm going to ride
Two white elephants, side by side.

Chorus.

Little David, pluck upon your harp, hallelou,
Hallelou, little David, pluck upon your harp, hallelou.

Some o' dese nights about twelve o'clock,
Dis old world gwinter reel and rock.

Chorus.

De Lord made a wheel and he made it round,
He roll' it in de hollow till de world turn around.

Chorus.

De Lord made de nigger, he made him in de night,
In such a hurry he forgot to paint him white.

Chorus.

If you want to see de debbil run,
Just pull de trigger o' de gospel gun.

Chorus.

Take care, sinner, how you walk on de cross,
Yo' right foot slip, and your soul done los'.

Chorus.

Went to bed, but it wasn't no use,
My feet stuck out for a chicken-roos'.

Chorus.

(And so on at will.)

The songs have suffered so greatly from this process of transference, that it is hard to assign correctly stanzas from a white's version. The tune of "Little David" is slow, almost wailing; but the tripping flippancy of the song as sung by the whites is offensive to the ears of religious-minded negroes who know the original melody.

The only instance that I have found of the intrusion of a contemporaneous event into a stanza before my eyes, was in the case of "Pharaoh's Army." While we were all singing stanzas like those cited above, the new one came in from the negroes. It seems that a schism had rent the largest church in town, the Sidney Park Church, so that a leader—one Reuben Bright, I think—had withdrawn with his band of followers; and then the large wooden structure had burned down one night amid tremendous excitement among the whole negro population who were present. The lines referred to run, —

Reuben Bright he had a scheme
To burn Sidney Park with the kerosene.

It had been rumored that night that the flames had spread so rapidly over the roof that kerosene must undoubtedly have been used. The appearance of Reuben Bright in the song suggests how other characters are borne along to fame or infamy on the wings of a song.

4. PLANTATION DANCES.

To Mrs. Harriette Kershaw Leiding of Charleston, I am indebted for this account of the plantation negro at play. It was taken down in the words of Maum Katie, a very old negro woman.

I tol' you about de ole days when I could dance, an' sing, an' pick cotton wid de best of dem, 'cause you know I done been raise' roun' de white folks ebber sence I been leetle mite,—wen I ain't but so leetle dat I can hide underneath' old Miss' rocking-chair. Den wen I gets bigger, I cum out an' hide underneath' her apern; den I get so big an' fat dat I gets to be a regular wheeligo gal: dat's our name for a big, bustin' gal.

Ole Miss she laff, an' say to Marster, "Let them have it, let them have it; they work all the better for it." O Lordee! dem were happy days: I always had my stomach full of vittles den. An' atter de fiel'-work, I teks my "fly-away" (dat's my hat), an' I teks de calico dress Miss done gib, an' I go to de nigger-yard; an', glory, how I done dance!

Pairing Off.

Here's de way we start. All de cullud folks crowd into de leetle room an' begin for sing:—

Hurrah, ladies, two on de floor,
Here we go to Baltimore.
Swing e lady roun' de town,
Sling 'em roun' de floor.

Then the gals begin to sing, —

A hack a back, ladies!
Wanter go to Aiken;
So, Mr. Jones, you can take me dere.

An' den dat gal go off wid e partner. Den another gal she holler out, —

A hack a back, ladies!
Wanter go to Augusta;
So Mr. Brown can take me dere.

Mr. Cooler.

An by an' by all of dem get paired off dataway. Den atter a while, somebody say, "Le's play Mr. Cooler."

Den somebody else holler out, "I holler for Mr. Cooler! I call for Mr. Cooler!"

Den some buck nigger who can cut up, he pint heself to be Mr. Cooler; an' he mok about, an' he mok about (look around), and atter a little he choose a lady. Den all wat lef' out begin to call on him fer help 'em play, an' dey sing tree times, —

Ole Mr. Cooler, wat is de matter
Stay away so long?

Den Mr. Cooler he say, —

At your call.

Lordee! he been polite: he ac' jes' like a king. An' atter dat, all ring up, an' go roun', an' begin to sing, wid Mr. Cooler in de middle, —

Mr. Cooler he lub sugar an' tea,
Mr. Cooler he lubs candy,
Mr. Cooler he can wheel an' turn,
And receive de one dats handy.

Den Mr. Cooler he shuffle, an' do monkey-tricks in de ring. He act like a mule, an' he paw, an' he snort, an' he back. Den all sing again, —

There's a mule in de middle, an' you can't get him out.
There's a mule in de middle, an' you can't get him out.
He wants some one to help him out, Miss Susie or Miss Julia.

Den Miss Julia she says, —

Spread your carpet on de floor,
Meet your true love at de door,
You mus' say yes, and den we'll go
Ober de hills an' far away.

Den all we-uns begin fer hum, an' do like de bee, —

Um-hum, um-hum,
 You black-eyed bee,
 Where will de weddin'-supper be?
 Way ober yander in de holler tree,
 Um-hum, um-hum.

Den dat couple dey git out an' leab de gal in de ring.

I do declare he mak' you laff fitten to bus' yourself, 'cause ebery nigger wat gets in, he got to be a animal ob some kind. De men mek' de fun, 'caze dey go like de mule, or dey hops roun' like de bullfrog, or dey bellows like de ox, an' dey do whatsoever de name of the animal dey takes. When de gal gets in de ring, dey is flowers, an' dey jes' caper' 'bout a little mite, an' prance, an' show he foot. Den here's de way we all sing wid de gal in de middle:—

My true love's gone, won't you help me to sing.
 My darlin' is a rose in de middle, an' I can't get her out.
 She wants some one to help her out, I think it's Mr. Benjy.

Rice Cake.

Den, Miss, atter we done play dis till we been tired, we sing a funny little song about rice-cake:—

Rice-cake, rice-cake,
 Sweet me so,
 Rice-cake, sweet me to my heart.

Den dey do some kissin'.

An' sometimes dey play in de ya'd, an' play "Roxanna, go, gal, go."

Roxanna, go, Gal, go.

All dat de buckra gib, you wear in de buckra fiel'
 All dat your sweetheart gib you . . .

At this point, Maum Katie's memory failed, and she never came past this point in her version of these plantation dances.

The incompleteness of the reminiscence is eloquent of what is happening now. The old woman is dead, and with her like will pass away much that could have been preserved. Let this conclusion of her account serve as mine; for, even as experienced workers in the field of folk-lore must have felt, certainly I feel, that I have held up but a flickering light in a dying world.